

Vesak Celebrations in Oman

Sri Lankan Buddhists now living in the Sultanate of Oman held their Vesak celebrations from the 6th to the 18th of May in great splendour and in a true spirit of Buddha glorification. The capital city of Muscat where these activities were held can be accurately described as an oasis in the desert. We wish to express our deep sense of appreciation to his majesty the Sultan of Oman for his vast vision and his sense of commitment to make the desert bloom. He reflects a great love of beauty in nature. The greater part of the Arabian peninsula is known in history as a desert with the legendary reference to the camel and the Arab tent.

Muscat is a clean and well laid out city, possessing an unbeatable richness of greenery, with trees of all types, and sitting pretty in the midst of ferocious rugged mountains which encircle the city all round. We would correctly call it a geologist's paradise with a remarkable diversity of pleasing rock formations every where one sets one's eye. To the Buddhist community living there, so far away from their homes, this year's Vesak celebrations provided another richness.

For almost two weeks, they made adoration to the Buddha, glorifying him with *vandanā* for his contribution to the uplift of mankind. Dhamma sermons also were held every day at the premises of the Sri Lankan embassy. They were well attended by Sri Lankan families, including elders, youth and young children. This meant a very healthy and active participation of three generations. Sri Lankan girls who are working in Muscat, beautifully clad in immaculate white, were swelling the crowds at these functions to a couple of hundreds. A garment factory, run by a Sri Lankan Buddhist, also turned out to be the venue for an evening Dhamma sermon. A few Buddhists from Bangladesh, Nepal and Malaysia were also there, lavishly offering gifts and participating in the activities.

Beautifully constructed Vesak lanterns were seen at a few places in the city. The popular venue for frequent individual and collective worship is a Bodhi Tree

which had been planted in an ancient work camp of Sri Lankans who had been taken there during the early years of city development in Muscat. It has a small *Buduge* too. During the festive season this place was tastefully decorated. A largely attended Dhamma sermon was held here too.

About a dozen persons including children observed *Aṭasi* during this season, and that for the full period of twenty-four hours. As a step in the direction of a renaissance in the third millennium, many Sri Lankan Buddhists in Oman agreed to initiate a weekly observance of a full vegetarian day in their homes and to observe one regular weekly fast at night.

The visiting monk in Oman this Vesak season was Bhikkhu Professor
Dhammavihari.